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VIET TRI IRON-STEEL ZONE IN NORTH VIETNAM

by Nguyen Tri Tinh

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VIET TRI IRON-STEEL ZONE IN NORTH VIETNAM

[Following is a translation of an article by Nguyen Tri Tinh in the Vietnamese-language newspaper Tien Phong (Vanguard), Hanoi, Nos. 531 and 532, 22 and 24 February 1960, page 2 in each issue.]

It was 6 P.M. Having just left the crowded national food shop, I hurried up to the power plant. There were no stars in the sky tonight, however, the electric lights from hundreds of windows in the numerous imposing plant buildings on my left and from the workers' residential area on my right illuminated brightly the entire new asphalt road. Men and women workers in all colors of shirts were walking back down the road, engaged in lively conversation. Atop the electric poles, tens of loudspeakers blared forth, and amidst the tumultuous noise of the plant buildings, joyous songs could be heard about "wishing success for the 3-year plan."

I approached the main entrance of the power plant. There were two very high columns inlaid with stone. At the top, was a red banner with brilliant yellow letters spelling out the slogan "Begin the 5-year plan with the power and energy of men determined to succeed." Someone slapped me hard on the shoulder: -- So the comrade has returned? Now then, there is no need for you to inquire and grope...

It was Vinh, a young engineer and a member of the plant's Group Executive Committee. A year ago, in the technical committee's office which had a thatched roof and bamboo partitions, Vinh had tried to use his imagination in order to tell me about "the future Viet-tri power plant" and for more than a half-hour, this electrical engineer became a romantic story teller.

Today, Vinh, "for the Group's newspaper," took me on a tour of the power plant. -- Surely the comrade has been to the Vinh power plant and the Lao-cai power plant...? They are absolutely the newest! This Viet-tri power plant is not inferior to them... the only difference is that it is much larger.

I tell you that the Viet-tri industrial area, the Lam-thao super-phosphate factory about to be completed, the Thai-Nguyen iron and steel area which throngs of men are building, and even Hanoi will draw their electric power from here...

After two hours of following behind Vinh, I observed the rubber carpets serving as pathways, the majestic boilers, the turbines which rumbled when they revolved, the steel tubes interlaced with each other,

many black buttons and red buttons, the sealed and solid rows of boxes for the distribution of electricity, the control center with countless gauges... The factory was extremely well-lighted and comfortable, and frequently, in stepping on the tile floor, I forgot completely that we were in a power plant! Here and there, young workers wearing visored caps, intently and calmly watching the machinery and the gauges, occasionally even nodded a greeting as if they understood I was a visitor and smiled as if to say: "Have you seen our power plant yet?"

Finally we ascended to the top floor of the main building and looked out upon the banks of the Red River. Vinh threw open the window. There in front of my eyes lay the Red River glistening with electric lights as though it were boiling because of the tens of docks which were linked to form a picture of feverish activity.

-- Do you see? There are the docks where they unload bamboo, sugar cane, salt, and many raw materials and other products for the paper mills, sugar factory, chemical plant, concrete factory... These plants, beginning their production, are enthusiastically competing with each other. Seeing the docks of the factories at work, then an instant later, seeing the vehicles traveling back and forth over the tens of asphalt roads linking this factory with the others, you know that in 1961, actually no one will concede to anyone else...

Having left the power plant and its young engineer, I had to negotiate at length with the security comrades before I received permission to go straight ahead on the tip-cart road and take a short-cut across the area of the paper mill, at present the largest plant in the industrial area. I had just stepped outside the wall when I felt myself enveloped by the shadow of a smokestack, standing high and motionless (people say that it is more than 60 meters high). At its top was the flag of our Fatherland, which had been fluttering in the wind for a long time. I did not find a guide, so I had no choice but to begin a "blind tour" starting from the dock where the bamboo is unloaded. Here, on large concrete floors, the bamboo is stacked into thick bundles. Nevertheless, in the spreading brightness of the electric light, the crane continued to operate with its characteristic noise, lifting the large bundles of bamboo, glistening with drops of water, from the wide barges. The sound of the men on the dock below the boat was tumultuous, intermingling with the sound of the tip-carts, noisily carrying the bamboo into the factory.

A flashlight shot a ray of light across the place where I was standing.

-- Say! The Van-dien battery gives a very good light.

I was pleasantly contemplating the conversation about the pair of civilian batteries of the Van-dien battery factory which had lit up the Viet-tri area, when another flash of light revealed that the person holding the light was Quy, a young projects engineer. I asked him immediately to show me around the modern factory.

-- I am very busy, Comrade! I have already worked several successive shifts. Even during its testing period, the men of the factory agreed to compete with many other factories... The loss of one minute is deemed unsatisfactory... Moreover, you want to find out the newest features of the factory, but you only left one night and that is not enough... I shall only give you a brief summary: Here is the flour branch, and the paper-pulp branch which have been completed, the sodium processing branch, the repair branch... You want to know the various kinds of machines? There are very many, and I cannot list them!

At this time, there appeared vividly before my eyes the images of steel tubes, copper shafts, electric buttons, chains, propellers... that is, everything that I could imagine about machinery.

Finally, unable "to withstand" my urgent pleading, Quy agreed to show me the part which "one should see first": the paper-pulp machine. Passing quickly by the tall buildings, brightly illuminated with electric light and amid the sound of the machinery, we entered into a space 50-60 meters long. The belts were moving, the shafts were turning, the electrical mechanism was vibrating... The complex machinery extended the length of the building and at the end, it ejected strips of white paper, wider than an arm-length and rolled like belts of cloth. I observed that the paper was moving out at a higher rate of speed than a person can normally run. Quy pulled out a brown plastic pen with the label of the "Hong-ha" Office Supplies Factory, hurriedly wrote a few words on a notebook, and said to me:

-- Here is writing paper, printing paper. This plant also makes cement bags. The expansion of the cement plant is progressing in such a way that the cement bags will come out in time.

At this time, I noticed some young women in green uniforms, standing in an orderly manner alongside the machinery.

-- The girls standing by the machinery appear to be in very good health!

-- What did you expect?! We are completely mechanized!

The girl turned around and I recognized at once Miss Ngo, a happy bricklayer whom I met at a workcamp in Lao-cai.

-- It has been a long time! How is it that you are here now?

-- Is there anything strange? I was selected for supplementary education, I studied how to stand by the machinery, then I came here.

She smiled, exposing her straight, white teeth, and I also noticed that her hair was cut shorter than when she was at the workcamp -- with a visored hat, it seemed that she was younger.

Quy gently took my arm: -- She is also on the women's volleyball team of the industrial area which is competing for the championship of the Ministry of Industry in Hanoi. An outstanding worker and an excellent ballplayer!

Miss Ngo hurried to a small table in the corner of the factory and returned holding an enamel cup of water and a pack of cigarettes:

-- Please have a drink of water! Have a smoke! This cup comes from the Haiphong Enamelware Factory and the cigarettes are the new type Ba-dinh from the Thang-long plant. The girls there sent us a number of gifts together with a challenge for competition...

In the flavor of the water-cup and the cigarettes which Miss Ngo brought us, I experienced all the sweet-scented bowls and exciting things of the many regions under construction in the Fatherland...

... At the chemical factory, it was really not difficult to find a guide. Right in the factory yard, at this time, there was an open-air meeting. In front of a large and orderly crowd, there were several posters with a large slogan "Forward with the yellow-starred red flag" and this made me realize that it was a youth meeting. What good luck! One of the youths standing nearby had shiny, combed hair and was wearing a long-sleeved cotton shirt with a heart-shaped collar and with the name of the Group sewed on a swallow (new-shirt label of the Dong-Xuan mill) -- perhaps he was the factory Group Secretary. He threw up his hands and spoke in a loud voice:

-- Comrades! Our factory is the first chemical factory of our country. At this emulation-recapitulation meeting, we suggest that a report of our accomplishments be sent to the youths of a number of newly-built factories, i.e., the Hanoi rubber goods plant, the Vinh oil-extract factory, the Haiphong battery plant...

A thunderous applause greeted the secretary's remarks...

Subsequently, delegates of the various branch-groups went up to speak; I heard: the branch-group of the salt division, the branch-group of the electrolysis division, the BVC division, the insecticide division, the sodium division, the chloric acid division, the bottling division...

I asked a comrade standing nearby: -- Why does this factory have so many divisions?

The youth whom I did not recognize in the light was probably one who loves to talk, and he did not wait for me to inquire further:

-- Oh! Why do you say there are so many! Do not consider this factory to be ordinary. The paper and weaving divisions need its sodium. The monosodium glutamate division which you see over there is also dependent upon its chemicals. It also makes insecticide... Do you want to know about the machinery? Go and borrow a pair of gloves, a pair of rubber boots, and a mask like ours to come in and see: intertwined tubes and bottles, a complete, extremely modern, complex production system.

I glanced up at the two and three-story buildings around me, and the lights from the windows spread tens of forms into the grey cement courtyard. I attempted to picture "the intertwined tubes and bottles" according to the description of my friend and according to those things that I had observed in a Soviet film which depicted a chemical plant.

-- We are determined! We are determined!

The shouting disrupted my mental images. I followed the crowd pouring out of the plant after work. They were all going "to the dance hall," so I headed for the sugar factory...

... I reached the building where the sugar cane is received, and I stood under a banner with a slogan in large letters "We are determined to carry out our competition with the Nghe-an sugar factory." The pleasant fragrance of the sugar cane filled the air. Strips of sugar cane came pouring forth, pushing the sugar cane into a spout. Automatic machinery moved the sugar cane up and through a steel box -- it is said that the box contains very many blades -- the sugar cane is cut into small pieces. Four presses, each with three axles, are joined to receive the strips of sugar cane. Having passed through these heavy machines with the twelve axles, the dried husks of the sugar cane fall into another automatic spout which carries it to the bagging room for transportation to the paper factory. I observed the steel tubes extending from the sugar cane presses: these are the tubes through which flow the sugar juice. From the press division, I crossed over to the deposit division. I must confess that when I was there, even though I made an effort to visit several stories of the factory tens of times, I was unable to remember the complex mechanisms including countless tubes and vats. People showed me: neutralizing vats, vats for separation, cauldrons for drying by heat... The workers who were watching the machines would occasionally glance at the gauges or glance down into the glass windows. I came to the last part of the factory: two funnels which poured the fat bags of sugar into hemp bags. Those fat bags of sugar followed each other to the tip-cart line so that they would be ready for storage in the warehouse... I asked a technical cadre who was standing nearby:

-- This factory consumes very much sugar cane, doesn't it?

He smiled, and with his warm Southern accent said: -- Very much... The output of the factory is high. You must know of the several factories in Quang-ngai where I am from. In the future, it is certain that our Government will have to build very many sugar factories.

The young man from Quang-ngai grew serious once again and stopped talking. He was staring at the streams of white sugar and was reminded of his native area of Quang-ngai.

The next morning, I had decided to visit the distillery, right alongside the sugar factory, the monosodium glutamate factory, the concrete factory (not to mention the mill and the brick factory) when I received a telegram from the newspaper office: "Return at once to board the Dong-anh--Thai-nguyen train and proceed to the iron and steel area for participation in the ceremonies initiating the emulation program of the various vanguard youth units who are constructing high furnaces." Aboard the train leaving the Viet-tri station amid much hustle and bustle, I glanced back once more at the line of tall

buildings, the skyscraping smokestacks, the dazzling banners of slogans, the bright homes where each doorway was the symbol of many fruitful working lives... I was deeply moved and with my cloth hat, I waved farewell to the great industrial area. The train whistle shrilled loudly. The factory whistles also shrilled. It sounded to me like the enthusiastic roar of our Fatherland, forever achieving brilliant victories...

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